**Exploring the form of poetry**

The poem has been written out below without the line breaks. Discuss with a partner and put a / wherever a line should end. If you think the line break should also mark the end of a stanza then put //. The title and headings for each section of the poem have also been left out. Again, discuss with your partner and put in your ideas.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (Title)

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_(Heading)

‘I am an aspirin,’ you say to the man behind the counter. He nods his head, uncertainly. He smiles. There is a pause. Perhaps he didn’t hear you. You speak a little louder. ‘I am an aspirin,’ you say, again. You smile. Everyone understands a smile, don’t they?

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_(Heading)

You have become uncertain in this shiny Circle-K, with its row upon row of Japanese snacks, and signs that scream in a language that you can’t understand. The promises of air-con and convenient convenience are not working out like your planned. Nothing is working out like you planned. You arrived…how long? Seven hours ago you got off the plane. And that was the end of all that you’d known until now.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_(Heading)

Nine hours before *that* with no doubts in your mind you sat in a plane on the edge of Australia. The smooth edge, the straight edge, the runway concrete. Everything under control. Taxiing smoothly to the edge of your life, ready to fly to another. Ready to fly to Japan. No doubts in your mind. You were leaving behind our everyday life with its everyday problems. You were flying away from a life that you wanted to change. It all seemed so simple back then.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_(Heading)

Back then, back then, not even a day ago. So much now changed, your head is about to explode. You left in winter. You were wearing a jumper. A scarf. A beanie. Seventeen socks. And now you stand swearing in a T-shirt and shorts, your head full of everything, your head full of nothing. Too much. There is too much noise, there are too many smells, and the cars on the street are all somehow just different, and you’re too jetlagged to say just *how* they’re different, but the streets are different, and the footpaths are different, and the air is different and the people, oh the people are different.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_(Heading)

And here. In this shiny convenience store. You weren’t expecting to find so much difference. Coffee in cans and rice balls and sushi and packets of tiny dried fish. You searched through it all for headache tablets, thinking that somehow that was going to help. But all you could fine was a swirl of unknowns. You can’t read the writing, and because you can’t read it it’s telling you nothing at all. Everything a haze of not-quite getting. Like this man who nods and smiles in front of you. There’s something he’s not quite getting.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_(Heading)

But then, a smile of understanding. He nods his head and turns away. Reaches down behind the counter for a crispy waffle cone. Turns to the soft-serve machine beside him, pulls you a perfect serving. Places it in the holder on the counter, rings it up on the till. What else can you do? You smile, you fumble, you hand him a note. You accept the coins he carefully places in the tray beside the register.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (Heading)

And at that moment, you suddenly get it. Your one (and only) Japanese lesson emerging through the jetlag haze. *Ice-cream? Aspirin?* Could they sound so much the same? Perhaps (just perhaps) your accent isn’t perfect just yet. Possibly (just possibly) you didn’t say quite the right thing.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (Heading)

And yet. This man in front of you. Listening hard as you mangle his language, politely trying to make sense of your mess. And more than all that, much more than all that, wanting to help you land on your feet.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (Heading)

You smile at him and pick up your soft serve, walk into the street with an ice-cream in your hand. You’re feeling much better already.

Compare your ideas with the actual poem from pages 65 – 73. Do you think the writer has chosen the right places for his line breaks? Try to find two examples where you think the choices are good ones and two where you would have put the line ending at a different place. Give reasons for your ideas. Consider the title and headings – again consider the writer’s choices and compare with your own. Give examples of two of the writer’s headings you like and two of your own you prefer. Again try to explain your ideas.